

Message Text

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ORIGIN AF-10

INFO OCT-01 EUR-12 NEA-10 IO-13 ISO-00 CIAE-00 DODE-00
PM-05 H-01 INR-07 L-03 NSAE-00 NSC-05 PA-01
PRS-01 SP-02 SS-15 USIA-06 OMB-01 EB-08 COME-00
TRSE-00 DHA-05 /106 R

DRAFTED BY AF/W:D V KILLION:JWM
APPROVED BY AF:W C HARROP
AF/W:T W M SMITH
NEA/AFN:J K BISHOP (SUBS)
-----118332 030628Z /20

P R 030254Z NOV 77
FM SECSTATE WASHDC
TO AMEMBASSY NOUAKCHOTT PRIORITY
INFO AMEMBASSY RABAT
AMEMBASSY ALGIERS
AMEMBASSY MADRID
AMEMBASSY PARIS
USMISSION USUN NEW YORK

C O N F I D E N T I A L STATE 262741

E.O. 11652: GDS

TAGS: PGOV, PBOR, MR, SS, MARR, XI, XY

SUBJECT: MAURITANIAN AMBASSADOR'S CALL ON AF DEPUTY
ASSISTANT SECRETARY HARROP

SUMMARY: MAURITANIAN AMBASSADOR KOCHMAN, IN OCTOBER 28
MEETING WITH AF DEPUTY ASSISTANT SECRETARY HARROP,
PRESENTED LONG EXEGESIS OF MAURITANIA'S POSITION ON
WESTERN SAHARA DISPUTE AND ON NEED FOR "NEW LOOK" BY US
AT RELATIONSHIP WITH MAURITANIA. KOCHMAN, ACTING UNDER
"STRONG INSTRUCTIONS" FROM PRESIDENT OULD DADDAAH PROMPTED
BY RECENT ZOUERATE ATTACKS, INSISTED FORMER SPANISH
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SAHARA IS MAURITANIAN, CHARGED ALGERIA'S BOUMEDIENNE
WITH REVERSING COURSE, DECEIT, AND EFFORTS TO OVERTURN
OULD DADDAAH GOVERNMENT. KOCHMAN FELT CURRENT SITUATION
AND MAURITANIA'S REALIGNMENT OF ITS POSITION ON INTER-
NATIONAL ISSUES OF IMPORTANCE TO US NOW IMPELLED USG
POLITICAL, ECONOMIC, TECHNICAL, AND MILITARY ASSISTANCE.
MAURITANIAN AMBASSADOR SAID HIS GOVERNMENT RESENTED
RECENT WESTERN SAHARA CONGRESSIONAL HEARING INVITATION
TO POLISARIO REPRESENTATIVE, TOOK ISSUE WITH SOME
PORTIONS OF STATE DEPARTMENT TESTIMONY AT THE HEARING,

AND COMPLAINED THAT POLISARIO REPRESENTATIVE NOW CARRYING OUT PROPAGANDA ACTIVITIES IN WASHINGTON STUDENT CIRCLES. HARROP ASSURED KOCHMAN OF OUR INTEREST IN CLOSE, FRIENDLY

RELATIONS WITH MAURITANIA, REVIEWED OUR ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT ASSISTANCE EFFORTS ON THAT NATION'S BEHALF, NOTED THAT WE HAD NO CONTROL OVER THE CONGRESSIONAL HEARING ON WESTERN SAHARA, POINTED OUT THAT WE WOULD REVIEW STATUS OF THE POLISARIO REPRESENTATIVE CURRENTLY IN WASHINGTON BUT THAT WE MUST RECOGNIZE FREEDOM OF SPEECH, AND TOLD KOCHMAN WE WOULD BE HAPPY TO MEET WITH HIM AT ANY TIME. END SUMMARY.

1. MAURITANIAN AMBASSADOR KOCHMAN, ACCOMPANIED BY COUNSELOR WANE, MET OCTOBER 28 AT HIS REQUEST EARLIER SAME DAY WITH AF DEPUTY ASSISTANT SECRETARY HARROP. AF/W COUNTRY OFFICER KILLION ATTENDED MEETING.

2. KOCHMAN SAID HE WAS UNDER "STRONG INSTRUCTIONS" FROM HIS CHIEF OF STATE TO HAVE THOROUGH EXCHANGE OF VIEWS ABOUT MAURITANIA'S DIFFICULT SITUATION OVER THE LAST TWO YEARS. (MEETING LASTED HOUR AND HALF.) KOCHMAN FELT THERE WAS VERY SERIOUS MISREPRESENTATION
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OF WHAT HAS ACTUALLY TAKEN PLACE OVER PAST FIVE OR SIX YEARS IN NORTHWEST AFRICA, AND HE WANTED TO CLARIFY MAURITANIA'S VIEWS WHICH SHAPE ITS RELATIONSHIP WITH MANY STATES, INCLUDING THE US. PERHAPS MAURITANIA'S MESSAGE WAS NOT COMING THROUGH. ALTHOUGH CHIEF OF STATE OULD DADDAH WOULD HAVE MADE SITUATION CLEAR IF HE HAD THE OPPORTUNITY, KOCHMAN WAS FULLY AUTHORIZED TO STATE OULD DADDAH'S EXACT IDEAS, WHICH THE PRESIDENT WISHES PASSED TO SENIOR STATE AND USG LEVELS, AND ESPECIALLY TO THE WHITE HOUSE. KOCHMAN SAID HE COULD BE "QUOTED VERBATIM" ON WHAT HE WAS ABOUT TO SAY.

3. KOCHMAN'S DEMARCHE WAS PROMPTED BY TWO RECENT RAIDS ON THE ZOUERATE IRON ORE COMPLEX. IN THE FIRST, ONE MAURITANIAN WAS KILLED, TWO WERE KIDNAPPED, AND FOUR LOCOMOTIVES WERE DESTROYED. IN THE SECOND, TWO FRENCHMEN AND TWENTY-FOUR MAURITANIANS WERE KIDNAPPED. SEVERAL EARLIER RAIDS ON ZOUERATE HAD ALSO BEEN MADE, IN THE FIRST OF WHICH, LAST MAY, SIX FRENCH CITIZENS WERE KIDNAPPED AND TWO FRENCH CITIZENS KILLED, AS WELL AS SEVERAL MAURITANIANS. THE POLISARIO ATTACKED NOUAKCHOTT LAST YEAR, AND AGAIN LAST YEAR DURING THE LIBREVILLE OAU SUMMIT. ALL THIS WAS DONE BY ALGERIA FOR ONE PURPOSE: TO CREATE THE IMPRESSION OF MAURITANIAN DISARRAY, DISORDER, CONFUSION, AND A "FALTERING OULD DADDAH REGIME" -- IN ORDER TO DISCOURAGE INVESTMENT IN IRON ORE MINING, WHICH ACCOUNTS FOR 90 PERCENT OF HIS

NATION'S FOREIGN EXCHANGE RECEIPTS. AN IBRD, ARAB BANK, AND EUROPEAN BANK JOINT TEAM HAD JUST COMPLETED A SUCCESSFUL VISIT TO MAURITANIA ON OCTOBER 18 TO LOOK

INTO THE DOLS ONE BILLION IRON ORE PROJECT (THE GUELBS PROJECT). THE POLISARIO ATTACKS WERE DESIGNED TO DISCOURAGE THIS INVESTMENT.

4. KOCHMAN FELT THAT NOW IS THE TIME TO PLACE THE
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ENTIRE SITUATION IN CONTEXT. FROM 1974 TO 1977 THE SAHARA QUESTION HAS EVOLVED DRAMATICALLY. KOCHMAN GAVE AS BACKGROUND HIS CLOSE RELATIONSHIP TO PRESIDENT OULD DADDAH, HIS ROLE IN OPENING THE FIRST MAURITANIAN EMBASSY IN WASHINGTON AND UN MISSION IN NEW YORK, AND HIS SUBSEQUENT SERVICE AS SENIOR ADVISER IN THE IBRD WITH RESPONSIBILITIES FOR NORTHWEST AFRICA. ON THE BASIS OF THIS EXPERIENCE, KOCHMAN WANTED TO REVIEW THE SAHARA "MILESTONES" AND TO STATE FORMALLY, ON BEHALF OF PRESIDENT OULD DADDAH, THAT THE FORMER SPANISH SAHARA IS MAURITANIAN. THIS CONCLUSION REQUIRES NO SPECIAL KNOWLEDGE OR EXPERTISE --THE SAHARA'S GEOGRAPHY, HISTORY, TRIBES, AND EVEN THE NAMES OF THE PEOPLE THERE MAKE IT EVIDENT. AND THESE TRIBES HAVE NEVER PAID ATTENTION TO BORDERS.

5. AS FAR BACK AS 1957, PRESIDENT OULD DADDAH HAD ANNOUNCED PUBLICLY THAT THE SPANISH SAHARA WAS MAURITANIAN. EVEN IN HIS "WHITE BOOK", MOROCCAN KING MOHAMMED V HAD DECLARED THE SPANISH SAHARA A PART OF MAURITANIA. THE SECOND HALF OF THE STATEMENT -- THAT MAURITANIA WAS IN TURN PART OF MOROCCO -- KOCHMAN COULD OF COURSE NOT ACCEPT. MAURITANIA TOOK ACTIONS IN INTERNATIONAL FORA EVERY YEAR AFTER INDEPENDENCE TO ASSERT ITS SOVEREIGNTY OVER THE SPANISH SAHARA AND WORKED HARD FOR DECOLONIZATION. MAURITANIA'S EARLY INDEPENDENCE WAS DIFFICULT. MOROCCO HAD ARAB SUPPORT, WITH FEW EXCEPTIONS SUCH AS TUNISIA, FOR ITS CLAIM TO MAURITANIA. THE USSR HAD VETOED MAURITANIA'S FIRST ATTEMPT AT UN MEMBERSHIP. OTHERS LABELED MAURITANIA A "POOR RELATION OF THE FRENCH EMPIRE", A "NATION WITHOUT EVEN A CAPITAL CITY", AND A "FABRICATION OF FRENCH COLONIALISM." BUT MAURITANIA AND ITS LEADERS PERSEVERED. PRESIDENT OULD DADDAH HAD
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REFUSED TO MEET WITH A SERIES OF MOROCCAN EMISARIES UNTIL MAURITANIA'S INDEPENDENCE AND SOVEREIGNTY WERE RECOGNIZED. MAURITANIA HAD COME A LONG WAY IN SEVENTEEN YEARS.

6. UNTIL 1975 ALGERIA WAS THE CLOSEST NATION OF ALL TO MAURITANIA, BECAUSE MAURITANIA HAD WHAT NO OTHER ARAB COUNTRY HAS: STRATEGIC GEOGRAPHIC LOCATION, SPECIAL ETHNIC MAKE-UP, AND TWO RACES LIVING IN HARMONY. MAURITANIA IS A LINK BETWEEN BLACK AFRICA AND THE ARAB WORLD. IT IS POTENTIALLY A RICH COUNTRY, WITH MINING,

FISHING, AND SOLAR ENERGY POSSIBILITIES. PERHAPS EVEN PETROLEUM WILL BE FOUND.

7. MAURITANIA SEVEN OR EIGHT YEARS AGO WOULD EVEN HAVE SETTLED FOR AN INDEPENDENT WESTERN SAHARA, BECAUSE IT WAS CONVINCED THAT THE NEW ENTITY WOULD IMMEDIATELY JOIN MAURITANIA. BUT MORROCO, WHOSE MAIN INTEREST WAS TO GET THE SPANISH SAHARA, KEPT URGING MAURITANIA TO GIVE UP ITS CLAIM. THE ALGERIANS WERE NOT EVEN INVOLVED UNTIL MAURITANIA "DRAGGED" THEM IN TO HAVE AN ALLY AGAINST MOROCCO. THE SPANISH BEGAN TO FEAR THAT ALGERIA, MOROCCO AND MAURITANIA WOULD COOPERATE TO IMPOSE A SOLUTION, WITH ADVERSE EFFECTS ON SPAIN'S PHOSPHATE AND OFF-SHORE FISHING INTERESTS. ALGERIA AT THE ARAB LEAGUE CHIEFS OF STATE CONFERENCE IN 1974 VOTED TO SUPPORT UNRESERVEDLY THE CLAIMS OF MOROCCO AND MAURITANIA TO THE SPANISH SAHARA, AND MAURITANIA HAS A TAPE RECORDING OF BOUMEDIENNE ACTUALLY SAYING THIS AT THE MEETING.

8. BUT AT THE SAME TIME, KOCHMAN ASSERTED, ALGERIA'S BOUMEDIENNE HAD STARTED SECRET DISCUSSIONS WITH FRANCO FOR AN INDEPENDENT SAHARA, IN EXCHANGE FOR DROPPING SUPPORT FOR THE CANARY ISLANDS INDEPENDENCE MOVEMENT AND COOPERATION ON EXPLOITATION OF ALGERIAN OIL.
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BOUMEDIENNE MADE A DEAL WITH FRANCO -- BUT HE DID NOT KNOW THAT FRANCO WOULD DIE. ALGERIA'S ROLE HAS NOT BEEN ONE IN SUPPORT OF SELF-DETERMINATION, BUT OF PURSUIT OF ITS OWN INTERESTS. THE ALGERIANS NOW SUPPORT A CONGLOMERATE, NOT OF SAHARANS, BUT OF DESTITUTE NOMADIC GROUPS FROM ALGERIA, MOROCCO, MAURITANIA, SENEGAL, MALI, NIGER, AND CHAD. NO ONE IN THE ARAB LEAGUE SUPPORTS ALGERIA. THE OAU HAS NOT SUPPORTED ALGERIA.

9. KOCHMAN SAID MAURITANIA REGRETTED LOSING TWO-THIRDS OF ITS COUNTRY TO MOROCCO (THE NORTHERN PORTION OF THE FORMER SPANISH SAHARA) BUT HAD NEEDED AN ALLY. THE PEOPLE OF THE TIRIS EL GHARBI (MAURITANIA'S PORTION OF THE FORMER SPANISH SAHARA) HAVE VOTED -- IN ALMOST A "SEMI-REFERENDUM" -- FOR REPRESENTATIVES IN THE MAURITANIAN NATIONAL ASSEMBLY. AND NOW MAURITANIA INTENDS TO RESIST ALGERIA TO THE END -- IN SPITE OF THE THREAT

BOUMEDIENNE HAD PERSONALLY MADE TO PRESIDENT OULD DADDAH IN BECHAR IN NOVEMBER 1975 THAT HE WOULD "SET DOWN OULD DADDAH'S REGIME".

10. THE ALGERIANS, KOCHMAN WENT ON, UNDERSTAND THAT RELATIONS BETWEEN THE US AND MAURITANIA ARE VERY GOOD AND ARE BOUND TO DEVELOP EVEN MORE CLOSELY. KOCHMAN

HOPED THAT IN THE NEXT MONTHS THE US WOULD UNDERTAKE A NEW REASSESSMENT OF MAURITANIA, AND WOULD CONCLUDE THAT IT IS NOT AN ANNEX OF MOROCCO. MAURITANIA HAD REASSESSED ITS OWN NATIONAL POSITION AND CHANGED IN WAYS MORE SUPPORTIVE OF THE US. THIS WAS NOT DONE TO PLEASE THE US, BUT BECAUSE IT WAS IN ACCORD WITH MAURITANIA'S OWN INTERESTS. NOW, KOCHMAN POINTED OUT, MAURITANIA NEEDS CONFIDENTIAL

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ASSISTANCE FROM THE US. ECONOMIC, TECHNICAL, POLITICAL, AND EVEN MILITARY ASSISTANCE.

11. KOCHMAN SAID THE ALGERIANS ARE EMBARKED ON A CAMPAIGN IN THE US OF BRIBING THE PRESS, AND A POLISARIO REPRESENTATIVE WAS EVEN INVITED TO TESTIFY AT A CONGRESSIONAL HEARING ON OCTOBER 12. TWO US PROFESSORS, OBVIOUSLY SYMPATHETIC TO THE POLISARIO, HAD ALSO TESTIFIED. KOCHMAN RESPECTED THESE TWO, ESPECIALLY DR. FRANCK, WHOSE WORKS HE HAD READ, AND THEY OBVIOUSLY HAD A RIGHT TO EXPRESS THEIR OWN OPINIONS. BUT THE POLISARIO SPOKESMAN, ABDULLA, WAS A DIFFERENT MATTER. HE HAS BEEN ENGAGING IN PROPAGANDA ACTIVITIES IN NEW YORK, AND NOW IN THE WASHINGTON AREA. KOCHMAN COULD NOT UNDERSTAND THIS, AND GAVE HARROP A COPY OF A LETTER EXPLAINING MAURITANIA'S POSITION WHICH HE WAS SENDING TO CHAIRMAN DONALD FRASER WHO HAD CONDUCTED THE CONGRESSIONAL HEARING (COPIES BEING POUCHED TO POSTS).

12. KOCHMAN THEN REFERRED TO THE STATEMENT BY THE STATE DEPARTMENT REPRESENTATIVE, NEA DEPUTY ASSISTANT SECRETARY VELIOTES, AT THE HEARING. IT WAS AN ADMIRABLE STATEMENT, AND HE UNDERSTOOD THE NEED TO BE BALANCED, GIVEN US NEUTRALITY ON THE DISPUTE, BUT THERE WERE A FEW POINTS KOCHMAN HOPED HARROP WOULD BRING TO VELIOTES' ATTENTION. FIRST, WITH REGARD TO THAT NEUTRALITY: THE US MAY BE NEUTRAL, AND MAURITANIA RESPECTS THIS, BUT AS THE MOST POWERFUL NATION IN THE WORLD THE US HAS SPECIFIC RESPONSIBILITIES. SECOND, WITH REGARD TO THE INTERNATIONAL COURT OF JUSTICE ADVISORY OPINION REFERRED TO IN THE STATEMENT: KOCHMAN WAS NOT SURE, BUT HE DID NOT BELIEVE THE OPINION HAD MADE ANY REFERENCE TO ALGERIAN TIES WITH THE SAHARANS. KOCHMAN WAS ALSO DISAPPOINTED, BUT MADE NO SPECIFIC CRITICISM, AT THE DEPARTMENT'S STATEMENTS THAT THE US HAD REFRAINED FROM RECOGNIZING MOROCCAN AND

MAURITANIAN SOVEREIGNTY WHILE ACKNOWLEDGING ITS ADMINIS-
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TRATIVE CONTROL OF THE WESTERN SAHARA, AND THAT THE US HAS TAKEN NO POSITION ON THE QUESTION OF SELF-DETERMINATION BY THE SAHARANS. FINALLY, SAID KOCHMAN, THE CONCLUDING PARAGRAPH OF THE DEPARTMENT'S STATEMENT SAID US POLICY IS SIMILAR TO THAT OF OUR WESTERN EUROPEAN ALLIES, MOST ARAB STATES, AND MANY AFRICAN NATIONS.

KOCHMAN SAID IN HIS OPINION THE ARAB COUNTRIES, WITH THE EXCEPTION OF LIBYA AND, OF COURSE, ALGERIA, SUPPORT MOROCCO AND MAURITANIA ONE-HUNDRED PERCENT. EVEN THE AFRICANS, KOCHMAN CLAIMED, REFLECTED THEIR SUPPORT FOR MOROCCO AND MAURITANIA BY THEIR RELUCTANCE TO ATTEND THE LUSAKA EXTRAORDINARY SUMMIT ON WESTERN SAHARA, WHICH WAS THEREFORE NOT HELD.

13. KOCHMAN TOLD HARROP HE HOPED THE US WOULD COME UP WITH A "NEW LOOK" WITH REGARD TO MAURITANIA. HE CALLED FOR MORE DIRECT COMMUNICATION BETWEEN HIS EMBASSY AND AF, IN ORDER TO AVOID SUCH THINGS AS THE SHORT NOTICE HE HAD RECEIVED OF THE CONGRESSIONAL HEARING. MAURITANIA RESENTED THE INVITATION TO THE POLISARIO TO PARTICIPATE IN THE HEARING, AND THE PROPAGANDA MEETINGS HE KNEW THE REPRESENTATIVE WAS HOLDING IN SUPPORT OF AN INDEPENDENT WESTERN SAHARA WITH GROUPS OF IRANIAN AND ETHIOPIAN STUDENTS IN WASHINGTON. KOCHMAN SAID HE DID NOT KNOW HOW THE US COULD PERMIT THIS TO BE DONE. HIS GOVERNMENT HAS THE RIGHT TO ASK THAT THIS SORT OF THING BE STOPPED. MAURITANIA RESPECTS FREEDOM OF EXPRESSION, BUT THERE IS A LIMIT.

14. KOCHMAN WENT ON THAT, IN ORDER TO COMBAT THE PRESS MISREPRESENTATION HE HAS SEEN ON THE WESTERN SAHARA DISPUTE, HIS GOVERNMENT IS PREPARED TO INVITE ANYONE
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FROM THE US TO VISIT MAURITANIA, INCLUDING TIRIS EL GHARBIA, TO LOOK AT THE SITUATION FIRSTHAND. THE VISITORS WOULD LEARN THAT MAURITANIA IS NOT CRUMBLING.

15. KOCHMAN REMARKED THAT FOR MAURITANIA THE DOSSIER ON THE WESTERN SAHARA IS CLOSED, BUT HIS GOVERNMENT IS PREPARED TO TALK TO THE ALGERIANS TO HELP THEM FIND A FACE-SAVING SOLUTION TO THE PROBLEM. IN CONCLUDING HIS PRESENTATION, KOCHMAN TOLD HARROP THAT HE HOPED THE FULL RECORD OF HIS CONVERSATION WOULD GO TO SECRETARY VANCE AND TO DR. BRZEZINSKI. (AT THIS POINT KOCHMAN EXPRESSED DISAPPOINTMENT THAT DR. BRZEZINSKI HAD NOT

AGREED TO MEET WITH FOREIGN MINISTER MOUKNASS. HARROP ASSURED KOCHMAN THAT WE HAD PASSED THE REQUEST TO THE NSC, BUT KOCHMAN SHOULD NOTE IT IS THE SECRETARY OF STATE WHO ORDINARILY MEETS WITH FOREIGN MINISTERS, AND HAD IN FACT MET WITH MOUKNASS. KOCHMAN COMPLAINED THAT THE MOROCCAN FOREIGN MINISTER WAS ACCORDED A MEETING WITH DR. BRZEZINSKI.)

16. HARROP WELCOMED THE OPPORTUNITY TO HEAR KOCHMAN'S VERY DETAILED AND FULL PRESENTATION. HE ASSURED KOCHMAN THAT WE VALUE OUR RELATIONSHIP WITH MAURITANIA. WE ARE

GLAD THAT OUR EMERGENCY FOOD ASSISTANCE, OUR ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT PROGRAM, AND OUR PARTICIPATION IN THE SAHEL DEVELOPMENT PROGRAM WILL BE OF BENEFIT TO MAURITANIA AS IT SEEKS TO PROMOTE ECONOMIC AND SOCIAL DEVELOPMENT. WE ARE NEUTRAL ON THE SUBSTANCE OF THE WESTERN SAHARA DISPUTE, WHILE BEING SYMPATHETIC TO MAURITANIA'S SITUATION. WE CONTINUE TO URGE A REGIONAL OR UN ARRANGED SOLUTION. ON SPECIFIC POINTS RAISED BY KOCHMAN, HARROP REITERATED THAT WE WERE JUST AS SURPRISED AS KOCHMAN BY THE CONGRESSIONAL HEARING AND THE POLISARIO PARTICIPATION, AND THAT WE WOULD LOOK INTO POLISARIO REPRESENTATIVE'S STATUS, GIVEN KOCHMAN'S CONCERNS, BUT HE SHOULD NOTE WE CONFIDENTIAL

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MUST RESPECT FREEDOM OF SPEECH. WE WOULD RELAY TO MR. VELIOTES KOCHMAN'S COMMENTS ON THE DEPARTMENT'S PRESENTATION AT THE CONGRESSIONAL HEARING.

17. KOCHMAN EXPRESSED APPRECIATION FOR THE MEETING AND FOR HARROP'S COMMENTS. HE SAID IT IS IMPORTANT TO REINFORCE THE VERY FRUITFUL DIALOGUE WHICH HAD BEEN GOING ON BETWEEN OUR TWO COUNTRIES FOR THE PAST TWO YEARS. PERHAPS WE SHOULD THINK OF ESTABLISHING JOINT COMMITTEES OR COMMISSIONS, SUCH AS THE US HAS WITH SOME OTHER COUNTRIES, IN ORDER TO ENHANCE THE MUTUAL PROFITABILITY OF OUR EXPANDING RELATIONSHIP. HARROP CONGRATULATED KOCHMAN ON HIS THOROUGH AND USEFUL PRESENTATION, AND ASSURED HIM THAT WE ARE ALWAYS READY TO MEET WITH HIM IN THE INTEREST OF OUR FRIENDLY RELATIONSHIP.

18. FYI. ON WAY OUT KOCHMAN TOLD COUNTRY OFFICER THAT HE WAS ARRANGING SERIES OF LUNCHEONS OR DINNERS WITH MOST OF THE KEY MEMBERS OF THE FRASER AND DIGGS SUB-COMMITTEES WHICH HAD HELD THE WESTERN SAHARA HEARING. KOCHMAN'S PURPOSE IS TO GIVE THEM DIRECTLY THE FACTS ON MAURITANIA'S VIEW OF THE PROBLEM. END FYI.

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Message Attributes

Automatic Decaptioning: X
Capture Date: 22-Sep-1999 12:00:00 am
Channel Indicators: n/a
Current Classification: UNCLASSIFIED
Concepts: AMBASSADORS, DIPLOMATIC DISCUSSIONS
Control Number: n/a
Copy: SINGLE
Sent Date: 03-Nov-1977 12:00:00 am
Decaption Date: 01-Jan-1960 12:00:00 am
Decaption Note:
Disposition Action: RELEASED
Disposition Approved on Date:
Disposition Case Number: n/a
Disposition Comment: 25 YEAR REVIEW
Disposition Date: 22 May 2009
Disposition Event:
Disposition History: n/a
Disposition Reason:
Disposition Remarks:
Document Number: 1977STATE262741
Document Source: ADS
Document Unique ID: 00
Drafter: AF/W:D V KILLION:JWM
Enclosure: n/a
Executive Order: 11652 GDS
Errors: n/a
Expiration:
Film Number: D770404-0920
Format: TEL
From: STATE
Handling Restrictions: n/a
Image Path:
ISecure: 1
Legacy Key: link1977/newtext/t197711116/baaaeufd.tel
Line Count: 380
Litigation Code IDs:
Litigation Codes:
Litigation History:
Locator: TEXT ON-LINE, TEXT ON MICROFILM
Message ID: 9d3b1a10-c288-dd11-92da-001cc4696bcc
Office: ORIGIN AF
Original Classification: CONFIDENTIAL
Original Handling Restrictions: n/a
Original Previous Classification: n/a
Original Previous Handling Restrictions: n/a
Page Count: 7
Previous Channel Indicators:
Previous Classification: CONFIDENTIAL
Previous Handling Restrictions: n/a
Reference: n/a
Retention: 0
Review Action: RELEASED, APPROVED
Review Content Flags:
Review Date: 22-Nov-2004 12:00:00 am
Review Event:
Review Exemptions: n/a
Review Media Identifier:
Review Release Date: n/a
Review Release Event: n/a
Review Transfer Date:
Review Withdrawn Fields: n/a
SAS ID: 426423
Secure: OPEN
Status: NATIVE
Subject: MAURITANIAN AMBASSADOR'S CALL ON AF DEPUTY
TAGS: PGOV, PBOR, MARR, MR, SS, XI, XY
To: NOUAKCHOTT INFO RABAT MULTIPLE
Type: TE
vdkgvwkey: odbc://SAS/SAS.dbo.SAS_Docs/9d3b1a10-c288-dd11-92da-001cc4696bcc
Review Markings:
Margaret P. Grafeld
Declassified/Released
US Department of State
EO Systematic Review
22 May 2009
Markings: Margaret P. Grafeld Declassified/Released US Department of State EO Systematic Review 22 May 2009